

PART 11

EWE PAPERS

## INTRODUCTION

EWE LINEAGE AND KINSHIP - SUB-ETHNIC GROUP  
VARIATIONS

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Modern anthropological studies of Ewe society began only some two decades ago with Barbara E. Ward's thesis on Ewe Social Organization (1949). This material was based substantially on German sources, mostly publications by Spieth and Westerman in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Quite apart from the wealth of scholarship and the modern methods of sociological analysis injected into the German data, later events proved that her most valuable contribution was to be the revival of interest in the scientific study of Ewe society. Years later, Ewe students trained in the modern methods of scientific investigation were to pick up her challenge.

Barbara Ward approached her subject from a wholistic perspective and raised more questions than she could answer in 1949. Since then the Ewe literary picture has become somewhat fuller, but the whole range of the complexity of Ewe social organization is just beginning to unfold. In terms of a unitary Ewe ethnic group, scholars since Ward are just beginning to realise that they have barely scratched the surface of "Ewe social organization". It is in this sense that the collection of Ewe papers of this volume, quasi-interdisciplinary in character and comparative in flavour, represents a significant step forward.<sup>1</sup> Even though the papers were not originally conceived as a sub-tribal comparative study, we have for the first time in the history of Ewe studies an assembly of papers on lineage, kinship and marriage based on original research and drawn from the major dialectal districts of Eweland, including Anlo, Tongu, the Northern and Togo Ewe.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the problems raised by the papers reflect both the diversity and uniformity in Ewe social structure. The Ewes are known to have a large degree of cultural uniformity, including traditions of migration from a common place and a common language, but there are striking differences as well. The common language itself has important dialectal differences, although mutually intelligible in parts. Not all the sub-ethnic groups have large integrated units resembling a clan<sup>3</sup> and there are differential emphases in

usage where such units obtain.

Dialectal differences evidently impose some differences in kinship terminology, and presumably in usage. It is not unexpected that the term for patrilineage varies from one sub-tribal group to another. Among the Northern Ewe, Dr. Kludze introduces a new interesting terminology, dzotinu (lit. firebrand), which he translates as nudekadulawo, implying those who eat of the same substance or share a patrimony. It is not known to what extent this term is generally accepted by Northern Eweland, but it is certainly not in use among other Ewe-speaking groups. In Anlo, writers have put forward terms like fome with its bilateral connotations, tofome (lit. father-family, in contradistinction to no-fome, mother-family) and afedo. As an analytical tool, the last term is not unacceptable, the only difficulty being that it is not within the vocabulary of the average speaker of the Anlo dialect. Among the specialist informants in the field the term seems to have more than one referent.<sup>4</sup> The Tongu employ similar terms for patrilineage, although they also tend to use agbanu which reflects clan section or the unit of a clan. There is no quarrel with these various terms as long as they reflect popular usage and have reference to a common denominator.

Dr. Ansre's paper, though conceived as a comparison of Akan and Ewe kinship terminologies, is quite relevant to the problems of comparative Ewe kinship studies. The discussions following his paper suggest that it is probably the hard core of terminologies which are common to the various sub-tribal groups. "Sibling names" present the point of widest divergence. On marriage, preliminary enquiries suggest that the Tongu enthusiasm for patrilineal parallel cousin marriage is not shared by other Ewe-speaking groups. Indeed, as the paper on this subject emphasises, this type of kin group marriage is extremely rare in African systems of kinship and marriage. It is the bilateral cross-cousin marriage which is common to all four sub-tribal groups, and most African systems.

Marital residence is remarkably uniform. The pattern everywhere is virilocal, although recent researches by this writer suggest varying emphases on duolocality as a variation of the norm. It is mostly in the broad concept of inheritance of property and succession to office that the Ewe groups come closest to a uniform practice. This is to be expected in a common patrilineal system. This unanimity is the point of emphasis by Dr. Kludze.

As he points out, the Northern Ewe inherit their father's property; so do other Ewe-speaking groups. This is entirely at variance with an earlier position adopted by Westermann who sees Anlo and Glidzi (Togo) succession as matrilineal. Other researches tend to support Dr. Kludze. But the paradox of the Ewe kinship system is that patriliney goes hand-in-glove with a warm recognition of maternal relatives in the kinship system. This is not to be confused with a partial matrilineal system or a system of double descent. As Kumekpor puts it with regard to the inheritance of property among the Togo Ewe and Anlo, there is "automatic, immediate, practical inheritance considerations to patrilineal relatives, while at the same time reserving potential or conditional inheritance considerations to maternal relatives." Elsewhere, in a longer treatise, Dr. Nukunya identifies Anlo inheritance in similar terms. (Nukunya, 1969). He shows that usufructuary rights in landed property inherited by daughters have been transferred to their sons. Among the Tongu steps are taken to recover such rights at this generation, in order to avoid complete alienation in the next generation. This could mean bitterness and/or hardship for some maternal relatives, but the Tongu do not exclude the possibility of absorbing children into the mother's lineage when hardship threatens in the child's own lineage. Thus inheritance through maternal kin is a reflection of the tremendous importance attached to cognatic kin ties in an essentially agnatic system.

In spite of these variations, the Ewe show a sufficiently high degree of cultural uniformity to justify describing them as a single ethnic group. As a patrilineal society, they obviously share the common characteristics of a patrilineal system. But even this point should not be overstressed, for as Dr. Nukunya points out for the Anlo, some agnatic systems are more thoroughly patrilineal than others.

I have identified certain areas of similarity and difference in the Ewe social system as a method of abstraction at higher levels. It is up to future research to enlarge upon these and to determine why the variations exist in such significant proportions. Are they in any way related to ecological differences, the fragmentation characterising the Ewe traditional political system, the varying influence of neighbouring ethnic groups or separate historical developments since migration from Notsie? Whatever the answers, it seems that an inter-disciplinary approach to the full understanding of Ewe society is a

necessity. The papers assembled here provide a useful and interesting beginning.

#### NOTES

1. Note that barely three years ago Dr. Nukunya was predicting that Barbara Ward's "generalised study" would remain for a long time to come the sole authority on Eweland as a whole. Fortunately, this prediction will not be sustained.
2. See the introduction to Fiawoo's paper which identifies these major sub-ethnic groupings.
3. For example, most of Northern Eweland has no system of clanship. The patrilineage represents the widest kinship unit.
4. In an earlier study this writer had used the term of afedomenoliwo to refer to the departed members of the lineage, including the ancestors. Usage in this ritual context is better known than its referent as a patrilineage.

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